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Letter dated 12 December 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to enclose herewith the statement made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, Felipe Pérez Roque, to the local and foreign media at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 10 December 2007, Human Rights Day, where the Minister announced the Cuban Government's decision to sign, soon, two important and well-known international human rights instruments, namely the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (see annex).

Furthermore, I kindly request that the present letter and its annex be circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda items 70 (a) and 70 (f).

(*Signed*) Rodrigo **Malmierca Díaz**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Cuba

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Annex to the letter dated 12 December 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement to the national and foreign press by Mr. Felipe Pérez Roque, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs on 10 December 2007

[Original: Spanish]

Good morning. We would like to thank all the national and foreign media correspondents who are here with us today.

We have convened this meeting with you to announce that Cuba is shortly due to sign the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Our country has chosen to announce this political decision today, 10 December, on Human Rights Day, as we commemorate the fifty-ninth anniversary of the proclamation by the United Nations General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The rights reflected in both Covenants, which are among the most important international human rights instruments, are widely protected by our domestic legal system, particularly owing to the achievements and accomplishments of the Cuban Revolution following its triumph in January 1959.

This decision, to be followed through in the coming months, demonstrates that our country will always maintain close cooperation with the United Nations system on the basis of respect for our national sovereignty and respect for the right of the Cuban people to self-determination.

As long as human rights manipulation persisted against Cuba; as long as the Government of the United States could transform the former Commission on Human Rights into an inquisitorial tribunal to persecute the countries that rebelled against imperial domination; as long as attempts were made to manipulate the issue of human rights against Cuba to justify the embargo and attacks against our country; as long as the human rights campaign against Cuba continued to prevail, particularly at the former Commission in Geneva, through brutal pressure and blackmail exerted each year by the United States of America; as long as all of this occurred, the minimum conditions did not exist to evaluate Cuba's new commitments to the United Nations human rights machinery. However, that situation has changed radically with the emergence of the new Human Rights Council, of which Cuba became a founding member thanks to the votes of more than two thirds of the members of the international community. The situation has also changed because, as is well known, the spurious mandate imposed by the United States to monitor the situation in Cuba was discontinued.

Since a new situation has arisen whereby human rights issues are not being manipulated against Cuba and the anti-Cuban strategies of the United States have failed, after 20 years in which Cuba had fought for truth and in defence of its principles and dignity, the conditions have now been met for Cuba to undertake new steps that will demonstrate its political will both to cooperate with the United Nations and to provide its contribution and experience to the international community in this field.

Cuba has never acted and will never act under coercion. However, once the Human Rights Council decided, and the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly confirmed, that the spurious anti-Cuban mandate would be discontinued, our country then put forward several initiatives for international cooperation in the field of human rights. Hence, we were recently visited by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food, and hence today's announcement concerning the Cuban Government's decision to sign the two human rights covenants in the first quarter of next year: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Furthermore, in the future our Government will extend invitations to other special procedures mandate holders of the Human Rights Council as evidence that human rights issues can no longer be manipulated against our country and that the twenty-year manoeuvres orchestrated by the Government of the United States have been utterly defeated. Our country can then provide clear proof of its desire for cooperation and attest to its commitment to the international defence of human rights.

The decision to further deepen its formal commitment by signing both covenants — since a real commitment has always existed and since it was the Cuban Revolution that guaranteed respect for the human rights of Cubans — is another example of what our country can do when there are no political conditionalities and when it is not unfairly singled out.

So it is that today, 10 December, on Human Rights Day, our country — in a free and sovereign manner, without external pressure and in keeping with its conscience and determination and in the exercise of its sovereignty — announces the signing of these two important human rights instruments as a further step forward in Cuba's commitment.

In accordance with the commitment that it entered into by supporting the creation of the new Human Rights Council and its procedures, Cuba is also preparing, in March 2009, to present a report and to be reviewed under the universal periodic review mechanism established by the new Council. Our country received this submission date of March 2009 as a result of lots drawn on an equal basis for all countries. In anticipation of this date, we are undertaking serious efforts in a spirit of cooperation and arising from a willingness not only to impart our results, our accomplishments, our shortcomings and our challenges, but also to hear the opinions of other stakeholders with respect to this issue.

Cuba will maintain this approach for as long as the current situation remains unchanged: i.e., that of non-singling out, non-selectivity and non-discriminatory or politicized use of human rights issues to attack or justify attacks on countries that do not submit to imperial decrees. As long as the situation remains the same as today, our country will be free to follow this path.

However, if, unfortunately and contrary to our desires and aspirations, this issue again becomes politicized and the atmosphere of cooperation and respect now prevailing among countries in the Human Rights Council once again deteriorates, our country would be compelled — and would not hesitate — to rejoin the fray and to brandish the flags that we have defended victoriously for 20 years, until such time

as we succeed in utterly and definitively defeating the campaign orchestrated by successive United States administrations against Cuba.

In addition to this announcement on the fifty-ninth anniversary of the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly, and as we begin the year that commemorates its sixtieth anniversary, Cuba today reiterates its demand — as called for overwhelmingly by the United Nations General Assembly in 16 successive resolutions — for the Government of the United States to lift the brutal economic, financial and trade embargo imposed on Cuba for almost 50 years, which is a flagrant, massive and systematic violation of the human rights of our people.

On a day like today, it is worth recalling that our people have been suffering for almost five decades from a brutal and genocidal embargo that seeks to bring them to their knees from hunger and disease.

On the day that the world commemorates Human Rights Day, we reiterate our demand for the United States Government to heed the opinion of the international community and to lift the embargo on Cuba.

Second, on behalf of the Cuban people, we call on the United States Government, without any further delays or justifications, to immediately close the shameful torture centre that it continues to operate at its naval base in Guantánamo, where prisoners have been subjected to all manner of harassment and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, in breach of all the guarantees enshrined in international law for imprisoned persons. In addition to the closing of this disgraceful centre, we demand that the United States Government return to our country the territory that it is currently occupying illegally and against our will in Guantánamo, thus depriving Cuba of its right to exercise sovereignty over that part of its territory.

Today, on Human Rights Day, we call on the President of the United States and the United States Government to close down the torture centre in Guantánamo and to return the illegally occupied territory to our homeland.

Third, on a day like today, we demand the immediate release of the five Cuban heroes: Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, Ramón Labañino Salazar, Fernando González Llort, Antonio Guerrero Rodríguez and René González Sehwerert, who are political prisoners held in United States jails subject to unjust and harsh convictions. Confined to punishment cells for long periods and subject to other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, they have now been held for nine years. As they enter their tenth year of captivity, we demand that they now be released.

In particular, on behalf of the Cuban people, we demand that Adriana Pérez O'Connor, the wife of Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, and Olga Salanueva Arango, the wife of René González Sehwerert, be allowed to visit their husbands, whom they last saw in 1998. We demand respect for their rights and we challenge the President of the United States and the United States Government to allow these two women, daughters of our nation, to be able to visit their husbands in the prisons where they are now serving harsh sentences.

Fourth, on behalf of the Cuban families mourning the loss of their loved ones as a result of the acts of terrorism committed by Luis Posada Carriles; on behalf of those families who lost children, parents and siblings; we demand that the

international terrorist Luis Posada Carriles, who today walks freely around the city of Miami under the protection of the Government of President Bush, be tried for terrorism and imprisoned, or that he be extradited to Venezuela, as called for by the Government of that country.

I would also like to express our satisfaction that Cuba's medical brigade — which is made up of some 300 members, who have been working in Guatemala since Hurricane Mitch struck the countries of Central America in 1998 — has been awarded the national human rights award from that fraternal country.

Since their arrival in rural, mountainous areas located in the wildest and remotest parts of Guatemala, Cuban doctors have provided more than 22 million consultations and assisted with more than 55,000 births. This recognition of their noble work is also recognition of all Cubans throughout the world who are currently making a generous contribution to respect for human rights, particularly the right to life for millions of people.

Today, on Human Rights Day, I would like to recall that, as we speak, there are 37,000 Cuban health workers in 79 countries. Of those, more than 18,000 are doctors. Thirty-seven thousand health workers in 79 countries! In the next few days one million patients will have been operated on free of charge under Operación Milagro (Operation Miracle). One million patients from 32 countries have had their eyesight restored in the last few years as a result of Operación Milagro, which was initiated by our country. These patients were operated on by Cuban surgeons, nurses and technicians either in Cuba or in their respective countries.

I would next like to highlight the fact that our universities have provided Government-sponsored scholarships to nearly 30,000 students from 121 countries. These are children from poor families, often from the rural areas of their countries. Of those nearly 30,000 students, some 23,000 are being trained in Cuba as doctors.

In recalling that our country has graduated more than 45,000 youths from the Third World throughout the years of the Revolution, of whom almost 35,000 are African, we must cite the words of Fidel Castro: "No freedom is possible without culture." We must also recall Martí, who said that "being educated is the only way to be free". And, with regard to what I have just said, I should also underline that thanks to the Cuban literacy method *Yo sí puedo* (Yes I can), designed by Cuban teachers and used by thousands of Cuban resource teachers, some 2.7 million illiterate people in 22 countries have already been taught to read and write; and another 600,000 illiterate people are currently learning to read and write in the languages of their countries, not only in Spanish.

In citing these figures I can modestly state, albeit with healthy pride, that Cubans are fighting not only to build a more fair society with full equality of opportunities for all its children but also for a socialist society with equal opportunity for all where full justice can be attained. I must also express our pride in the knowledge that our compatriots have already travelled to African countries to cure, to teach and to combat apartheid and colonialism. Over 350,000 Cuban voluntary combatants, both men and women, went to Africa to defeat the troops of apartheid, thereby contributing, in the twentieth century, to the elimination of a brutal form of discrimination on the basis of skin colour. It was also in Africa where more than 2,000 sons and daughters of our country laid down their lives, thereby making possible the preservation of Angola's territorial integrity, the emergence of

Namibia as an independent country, the release of Nelson Mandela and the dismantling of the cruel apartheid system. That system was kept alive by the shameful support of many who now try to forget that in the past they were accessories to the apartheid regime, which they helped to arm and to violate United Nations resolutions. First and foremost among these is the Government of the United States. I would therefore like to express our pride that we in Cuba are not only working for and defending civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for our people, but that we are campaigning in other countries of the world so that these rights become truly accessible to all and no longer merely rights proclaimed on paper.

Today, we express our conviction that neither the manoeuvres orchestrated by the United States Government with the participation of a few mercenaries, whom they pay and send to our country, nor that Government's threats, its abundant sums of money used to finance betrayal and disloyalty, its media campaigns, its power over the international media or its pressure on other Governments to join its anti-Cuba campaigns will cause our country to waver from its course of defending human rights for our people and for other peoples.

Cuba celebrates this day, 10 December, Human Rights Day, with its head held high and with the conviction that its people have maintained and forever will maintain a victorious revolution that truly ushered in the genuine enjoyment of human rights for our people: the enjoyment of all human rights for all the children of our homeland!